

Castlemaine

Naturalist

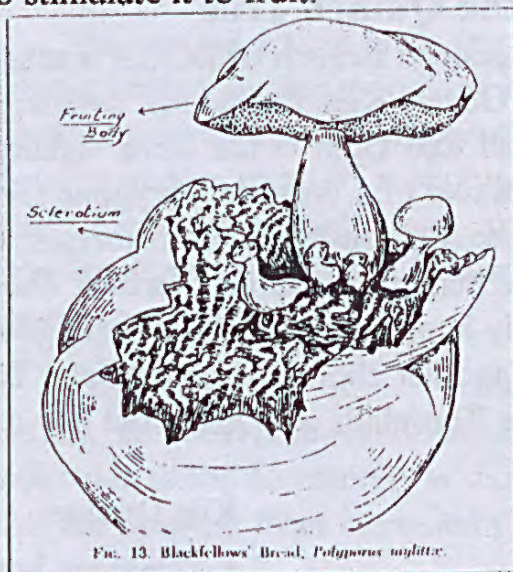
July 2001

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Interesting Fungi

Lachlan Moody and his parents, Craig and Linda, brought a very interesting fungus to the June meeting. It was by that time rather dried, but had a fine spongy exudation from a couple of places, it had a hard brown coating which was beginning to break away in places, was found underground among the roots of a pine tree that they had been grubbing out, was about 25 - 30 cm across and weighed perhaps 2 kgs. I thought it might be what my father called Blackfellows' Bread, and George Broadway agreed, but I rang a very knowledgeable amateur mycologist in Bendigo, Reg Smart, and he thought that could be what it was, too, but advised me to ring Tom May at the Herbarium, which I duly did, and by the time I gave the description he said that it would be Native Bread, which I guess is the more politically correct name. It's botanical name is *Polyporus mylittae*. He told me that when dry it becomes like horn and can be carved, and has a rather marbled effect. Furrer, in his book on fungi, describes it as "resembling compacted boiled rice". It can also be stimulated to grow and fruit by cutting it in half - but you'd need a good saw! In nature it appears that it needs a fire to stimulate it to fruit.



Ern Perkins also discovered a little about Blackfellows' Bread in an old "Australian Nature studies" by J.A. Leach. I have the same book at home, so looked it up, and found that: "The dense mass (of the Blackfellow's Bread) is a reserve material stored away until needed; it is the resting stage in the life-history of a fungus (polyporus). If you are fortunate, you may see the mushroom-like outgrowth that forms the spore-scattering stage. The resting stage is a hard mass which is sometimes mused for making the handles of

walking sticks. Specimens of Blackfellow's Bread may weigh up to 20 lb (9 kgs)." So the one brought to the meeting was only a baby!

Reg had told me of another fungus he has in his garden, which he found growing under some cypress trees against the back fence. They look a little like the one the Moodys brought to the meeting, but they are a little above the ground, and are rock hard. This is probably one of the two species of polypor known as "Stone-maker" fungi, because they are so hard. They are sometimes so heavy that one person cannot lift them. They are both underground species like the Blackfellows' Bread, but the one in Reg's garden may have been uncovered during a cleanup, which is when he found them many years ago - and they are still there.

Rita Mills

Winter Birding

Several members of the club joined Marjorie and Ken Cross and several of the Woodend BOCA group for an outing to Gower and the Quince Tree on Saturday 16/6. It proved to be a most enjoyable day, especially for the Woodend people as it was fine up here, and we had a bird list of 37, which included several special sightings - a flock of about 15 White-browed Babblers foraging about 150 m behind the ruins, Chestnut-rumped Hylacolas (a first-sighting for a couple of people), a flock of Sittellas and a flock of about 6 Weebills - as well as the usual crowd of Fuscous Honeyeaters! - all at Gower, and after lunch at the Quince Tree we went for another walk, and found, within 100 m radius, Scarlet Robins, Eastern Yellow Robins, Flame Robins and two of us saw the Pink Robin which Ern Perkins had spotted when we were on the Swift Parrot Survey in April, so perhaps they have decided to settle there.

Rita Mills

Also from that outing -

Mimicry at the Quince Tree

On a recent outing with the Woodend Branch of BOCA a small group of us including Maureen, Maggie Oliver, Ken Cross and myself heard a "foreign" bird call coming from a tall Red Gum in the close vicinity of the Quince Tree. We identified the call as that of a Western Gerygone (Warbler), a bird that is not at all common in the Maldon-Muckleford forests. Imagine our surprise when we discovered the perpetrator to be a Brown Thornbill. I called him up closer and he obligingly hopped to a lower branch, giving us a full, clear view of him as he gave us another chorus of his mimicry. To quote from Slater's field guide on brown Thornbills - "Quiet, but far carrying, mimicry"

Ken Dredge

Woodland Birds

In the VicBabbler, June 2001, there are two articles by Stuart Dashper, both of which are relevant to our area. One is "Woodland Birds in Decline" and the following one is "Tourism and Woodland Birds". The first discusses the issues of habitat loss, fragmentation and degradation of woodlands, and the effects this has on bird populations. The second argues the benefits of tourism, particularly, in this case, considering the report "economic analysis of the establishment of the Rushworth-Heathcote National Park".

This is all argued and considered from a scientific point of view.

To quote it in part: "The precarious state of our woodland birds is reflected in the recent listing of the 'Victorian temperate-woodland bird community' as threatened by the Minister for the Environment and Conservation." (That sounds a bit doubtful, but I don't *think* he means what it sounds like! Ed.) "This is believed to be the first time that an entire community of birds has been recognised as threatened under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act."

The listing is based on a recommendation by the Victorian Scientific Advisory Committee. It is now up to NRE to produce an action statement "to address the decline this bird community and provide a framework for its conservation."

Birds included in the list are Barking Owl (E), Powerful Owl (E), Bush Stone-curlew (E), Grey-crowned Babbler (E), Red-capped Robin, Hooded Robin, Jacky Winter, Black-chinned Honeyeater, Painted Honeyeater (V), Regent Honeyeater (CE), Crested Bell-bird, Chestnut-rumped Thornbill, Speckled Warbler, Swift Parrot (E), Rufous Whistler, Southern Whiteface, Diamond Firetail and Crested Shrike-tit.

(C = critically endangered, E = endangered, V = vulnerable, as defined by DNRE)

The second article reads in part "As part of a campaign to offer better habitat protection for woodland birds, Birds Australia's VicGroup recently funded an investigation through the VNPA by Gillespie Economics into the benefits and/or costs of a National Park in the Rushworth-Heathcote area. This forest represents one of the largest contiguous stretches of Box-Ironbark forest left in Victoria and is currently mainly State forest used for timber production.

"The reportshows that present uses such a firewood cutting are not high value industries. The cost of the removal of these industries to the community is slight when compared to the economic returns that are possible from increased tourism and spending on park establishment and maintenance."

Gillespie Economics' report shows that "even modest visitation rates would create significant additional economic turnover....."

The report concludes "Conserving biodiversity in Victoria's Box-Ironbark forests is a great challenge..... So, now is the time that we should be arguing for the protection of birds in this dynamic but sadly neglected part of the Australian environment".

If you are interested in reading these articles, both Chris Morris and Rita Mills have copies of the VicBabbler.

Also, **Birds Australia** is planning a **Campout**, in celebration of Box-Ironbark Forests to be held in **the Paddy's Ranges State Park near Maryborough** over the weekend of **6-7 Oct**. The camp will be co-ordinated by Jason Doyle of the VNPA and hosted by the Maryborough Field Naturalists Club. More details will be provided closer to the date, but you can contact Jason by phone on 9650 8296 or e-mail jasond@vnpa.org.au.

The Tale of the Lost Dinner

The following events took place in the mid-afternoon, Monday the 18th of June, at the policeman's house in Fryerstown.

I was spraying the dreaded oxalis along the outside of the fence, when approaching an old, half dead *Acacia dealbata* I noticed grey fur tufts scattered about. Upon investigating said fur I found the deceased body of a young male Ring-tail Possum with fresh *Jasminum mesnyi* leaves clutched in its front paws. Deciding that prompt removal to the compost heap was in order I picked up the body with my gloved hands, admired its lovely colouring and splendidly long, white-tipped tail and proceeded to the compost heap.

Upon returning to my task I picked up my spray equipment and on doing so felt the very close flutter of large wings. I turned to see a Tawny Frogmouth perched on the fence post, directly behind me. Standing quietly I admired this second encounter with things beautiful and was in turn scrutinized by a large, golden eye. As the Frogmouth was not at all shy I ventured to speak, exclaiming of its beauty and realizing that the Ring-tail Possum was highly likely its prey, and that I had just removed its dinner. I apologised, explained my mistake and how I would immediately rectify the situation.

Quickly and quietly I moved off and retrieved the possum from the compost heap. Upon returning the Tawny Frogmouth was still on the fence post watching my actions carefully. The possum was replaced in its position and I stood away to see what would happen. With one last look at me the Frogmouth closed its eyes and took up the freeze position.

Deciding the Frogmouth should be shown to Benjamin, who was digging in another area of the garden, harassed by two Yellow Robins, I quickly walked across, explained the situation and we both returned to the site. "Too late!" I thought. The Frogmouth was no longer on the fence post. Benjamin spotted it on the matching grey bough of the Acacia directly above the prone body of the possum.

What a splendid world!

Diane Thomson

PS Fryerstown on a Monday afternoon is a very birdie place. Benjamin and I have spotted quite an assortment of birds including a "noise" of 15 - 20 Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos. You can hear them coming across the valley. They sound like Cockies with sore throats. D.T.

Birding in the Brisbane Ranges

Margaret Badminton and I set off on the morning of 23/6, despite the fact that the weather forecast for the ranges was cold and showery. The forecasters were wrong, and we had a very pleasant day. The main area we visited was the Stony Creek picnic area, and it was alive with birds, and even though we didn't see the Rose Robin or the Powerful Owl we delighted in the company of half a dozen Brown Treecreepers, three of which came right up to us and sat on the table while we had lunch, coming within centimetres of our hands and looking hopefully for handouts. They scored one on two tiny titbits, despite that fact that we told them that it wasn't good for Treecreepers, but I think they felt they knew better.

Seeing these little birds at such close range we could see that the speckling of the breast was formed by separate patterned feathers, the little eye was so alert and watched us intently, and they would stand on tiptoe to check if they were missing anything. I noticed that the claw on the hind toe was very long and hooked. Actually, all the claws were quite long and tended to hold their toes off the table, but they were very efficient for clinging to the edge of the seat on the way to the table top.

Every time another bird arrived they were chased off with much scolding. One bird seemed to feel the cold more than the others and was continually fluffed up, and another was more slender than the rest - this seemed to be the one in charge of the area. Each of the birds seemed to have a regular flight path that it took to the table, and it was the little fluffed up one that arrived via the edge of the seat next to me.

As we sat there we were joined by a family of Blue Wrens, which were much more nervous, but still came within a metre of us, and a Grey-shrike-thrush which didn't come closer than about 3 metres. I've had

Wrens join a picnic before today, but they never gave me the pleasure these little brown visitors gave - though I think *they* considered *us* the visitors!

Margaret and I had a delightful walk up to the dam wall earlier, taking about an hour to do the whole kilometre! There were probably hundreds of birds, but not a lot of species, with honeyeaters predominating, especially Yellow-faced, Yellow-tufted, White-eared, New Holland, White-naped and Eastern Spinebills, but there were a few Black-chinned as well. The flowering Yellow Gums were the attraction. There was a flock of Silvereyes, a few Musk Lorikeets, Crimson Rosellas, Little Ravens, White-browed Scrub Wrens and of course Grey Fantails.

I was surprised by the number of plants in flower beside the Yellow Gums - Common Heath, a couple of correas, including one with a long red bell and white tips to the petals, a purple Brachycome daisy, hakea and Golden Wattle.

There is a path that goes from that picnic ground to the Anakie Gorge picnic area, and takes about 2 hours the round trip (probably a lot longer for the likes of us!) and Margaret and I have determined that we must do it sometime. Perhaps we could do it as a club outing?

Rita Mills

Observations

- Debbie Worland reported 50 Swift Parrots on the 17th fairway at the Castlemaine golf Course on 8/6, and since Anzac Day there have been 60 Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos on the Course. She also reported that a solitary White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike has returned to the same area as the Swift Parrots, and was first seen on 6/6. She also reported a still-active European Wasp nest in the creek. A Grey Shrike-thrush nearby appeared to be feeding on the wasps. No Grey-crowned Babblers have been seen. There was a flock of about 45-50 Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos reported from Chewton by Louise Rennie. Mark Rye also saw them in Fryerstown road, Chewton.
- Margaret Badminton reports that the Swift Parrots left the Golf Course in mid-June.
- Cootamundra Wattles are starting to flower in Castlemaine, Hedge Wattle is in flower already in Talbot and masses of Golden Wattle in the Wattle Flat Bush. Ern Perkins.
- Chris Morris disturbed a bird on the ground near his house in Little Bendigo recently. Its silent flight identified it as an owl.
- A Basket Fungus was found by Joy Robinson in her garden in Merrifield Street. Barbara Maund
- The two Black-shouldered Kites are still in Happy Valley. Maureen Dredge. **AND** a pair of Brolgas flying north to south in Wattle Flat area were spotted by Ken Dredge on 26/6!

FROM THE BUSINESS MEETING, 28/6/01

As a result of a meeting with Shirley Deiz and others the club has written to support the submission sent to the **Threatened Species Network** by Shirley, and has expressed interest in doing bird and plant surveys on private blocks as our share, if the submission is successful.

National Threatened Species Day will be held on Sept. 2, 2001.

The Expedition Pass Committee of Management is looking for someone from Field Nats to come onto the committee, which meets at the town hall on the second Thursday of each month at 5pm. **If you would be interested please let one of the Committee members know.**

Also they are holding **two planting days**, one at Ellery Park, Chewton on Sunday July 8 at 10 am - There will be a barbecue lunch - and the other on National Tree day on July 29. Contact John or Marie at Golden Point Orchards for details.

The club congratulates two of its members, Ivan Addis, who received the Award of Merit from the Royal Historical society of Victoria, Inc. in recognition of the stirring work he has done for the Castlemaine Historical Society, **and Zoe Thomson**, who is now Community Liaison Officer, Parks Business Unit for the Brimbank City Council. **Congratulations Ivan and Zoe!**

We welcome to the club new members Bill Davies, Craig, Linda and Lachlan Moody and Michael Lane.

Grampians Campout 26 - 30 Oct. 2001

We have received the preliminary notice of the VFNCA Campout at Halls Gap, which will be held at Camp Acacia which is spread over a 5 acre area in the heart of Halls Gap. Up to 90 people can be accommodated in 15 rooms, all of which are heated and carpeted.

The program has not been finalized at this stage, but some of the areas to be visited will be the Stawell Ironbarks and Jaluka forest, which is reputed to be a wonderful place to visit.

If you would prefer to stay elsewhere there are plenty of places available. The closest accommodation to Acacia is the Halls Gap Caravan Park (Ph 5356 4251) or the Pinnacle Holiday Lodge (Ph. 5356 4249)

Approximate costs are -

Accommodation and meals -

Friday dinner to Tuesday lunch inclusive, \$170 - \$175

Friday dinner to Sunday lunch inclusive, \$100

Meals only -

Friday dinner - Tuesday lunch - \$110

Friday dinner to Sunday lunch - \$70

Attending but not staying or eating at Camp Acacia - \$30

Further details and a booking form will be sent out in the next few weeks. Fuller details of the preliminary notice available at the July meeting.

CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST, JULY 2001
PROGRAM

General Meetings are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) hall, at 8.00pm on the second Friday of each month, except January. Entrances to the car parks are beside the Art Gallery and beside the Church building in Lyttleton Street. **Excursions** leave promptly at times stated, usually on the Saturday after the general meeting, (BYO afternoon tea). There are NO excursions on TOTAL FIRE BAN days. **Also note** that outdoor events are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions.

Business Meetings are held at 27 Doveton Street on the 4th Thursday of each month, except December, at 7.30pm. All members are invited to attend.

**VISITORS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME TO CLUB MEETINGS AND
EXCURSIONS**

Fri. 13 July. **Toad Studies in the Northern Territory.** Speaker is Graeme Watson. UCA hall, 8pm

Sat 14 July **Local Fungi Excursion - learning together.** Leave 13 Mostyn St (outside CHIRP) at 1.30pm. Leader G Harris.

Fri. Aug. 10. **Weed Control in the Mount Alexander Shire.** Speaker is Darren Bos, Environmental Project Officer for Mount Alexander Shire. UCA hall, 8 pm.

Sat. Aug. 11. **Wellsford forest, Epsom.** Leave 13 Mostyn St. at 1.30pm. Leader is C. Morris.

Wed Aug. 15 **Cape Broom Pull and Official Launch of Signs.** Start Pull at 9.30am, BYO morning tea, catered barbecue lunch at 12.30pm, **launch of signs**, 2pm followed by catered afternoon tea.

Fri. Sept. 14 **Nicaragua.** Speaker is Neil Norris. UCA hall, 8pm.

Sat. Sept. 15 **Terrick Terrick.** All day outing. Leave 27 Doveton St at 10 am. Take morning and afternoon tea, lunch, and a drink, as well as binocs, etc.

Thurs. 27 - Sun 30 Sept. **Club Campout at Paradise Gardens (Redman Bluff) Camping Ground,** Long Gully Road, Pomonal. There are lots of birds, flowers, walking tracks and a telescope for astronomy at the camp, and a visit to the Nook at Moyston famous for its orchids, is visualized, as well as a visit to a nearby plant nursery which is set in a large acreage of native bush. If you wish to book one of the onsite vans please give Rita your name as soon as possible (Ph. 5472 4553). One day's fee is required as a deposit (\$18) for an on-site van. The Secretary has a brochure about the camping ground. Bookings will be finalised by Mid-August.

Fri. 26 - Tue. 30 Oct. **VFNCA Campout at Hall's Gap.** Preliminary details p7.

Disclaimer - The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributor and not necessarily those of the club.

2001 Committee E. Perkins (President) ph 5472 3124, C. Morris (V.P. and Grievance Officer), G. Broadway (Sec.) ph. 5472 2513, J. Turnbull (treas.) ph. 5474 3005, R. Mills (NL Ed. and P.O.), M. Dredge, M. Oliver, B. Maund, B. Envall.

Subscriptions for 2001 -

Ordinary Membership: Single \$22 Family, \$30

Pensioner or student: Single \$19 Family \$24

Supporting: \$31 The subscription also covers postage of the 'Castlemaine Naturalist'.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

P.O. Box 324, Castlemaine. 3450.

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